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ABSTRACT

A study was done to describe the development of seven alternative schools for youth who dropped out of high school or who were at risk of doing so on the model of a Brooklyn (New York) alternative school, High School Redirection. The replication demonstration took place in the 1988-89 and 1989-90 school years in Cincinnati (Ohio), Denver (Colorado), Detroit (Michigan), Los Angeles (California), Newark (New Jersey), Stockton (California), and Wichita (Kansas). Only six sites, however, were fully participating: Denver ceased participating in the documentation/technical assistance project in Year 2, and Detroit did not open its alternative school until Year 2. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to study the schools including the following: (1) site visits; (2) student opinion surveys; (3) student data surveys; (4) assessment of school outcomes; and (5) assessment of student outcomes. For the most part sites were able to replicate the model criteria. The replication of the educational content of the model was more complex and depended on several locally controlled factors. Findings on school and student outcomes indicate that schools enrolled and retained a substantial number of at-risk students, that more than 50 percent of the students persisted in all of the schools for both years, and that retention and persistence improved at all sites. Included are 2 tables, 2 appendices containing 6 tables, and 43 references. (JB)

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LESSONS FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL REDIRECTION REPLICATION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the development of seven alternative schools for young people who dropped out of high school or were at risk of doing so. The paper is based on work carried out by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) during 1988 -1991, to document and provide technical assistance to the seven alternative high schools as part of a replication demonstration funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The schools were modeled on a Brooklyn alternative school, High School Redirection, which was originally funded in 1968 to develop a program that would meet the academic and employment needs of students who had already dropped out of school. In AED's documentation of the schools we addressed the following questions: How did the local district and city context affect the implementation of the Redirection model? What were the characteristics of local school leadership and how did the leadership which emerged affect the implementation of the school? To what extent were the schools able to develop a distinctive vision for the school and a school community that promoted bonding by students and staff? To what extent did the academic program provide an effective and engaging learning environment? How successful were the schools in developing supportive services or linkages to them to assist students in staying in school and in finding employment during school and after graduation? How successful were the schools in retaining various subgroups of students? How well did students do compared with their prior experiences in traditional schools in terms of attendance, course passage and credit accumulation? And how did students perceive the school community and the academic program, particularly in comparison to previous school experiences?

Background

In response to growing concerns about the links between dropout, poverty, and unemployment, and in recognition of the attention that has been focused on dropout prevention through the creation of schools or programs within schools that make high

school graduation a possibility for every student, the United States Department of Labor commissioned an alternative school replication demonstration. They reviewed high school programs around the country that had been described as successfully addressing the educational needs of students who had already dropped out of school or who were potential dropouts. Their objectives were twofold: to provide high school graduation opportunities for youth who had left school or were likely to (especially low-literacy level youth); and to test the viability and replicability of an alternative school model

In their review of projects, the Department of Labor identified High School Redirection (Brooklyn, New York) as the model for replication. High School Redirection is an alternative high school which serves 500 students, most of whom were former high school dropouts. Over the years the school has developed and refined approaches and components that were particularly effective in attracting older (18 and over), student with low literacy levels who had dropped out. (At least a third of the student body has literacy levels at or below the grade equivalent of fifth grade.) It prides itself on its literacy program, STAR (Strategies and Techniques for Advancement in Reading)[1], which provides intensive instruction in reading, writing and mathematics in addition to the regular high school curriculum. The STAR Program exists as a school-within-the-school, serving approximately 150 students reading on grade levels 0-6. Redirection also has a childcare center with supportive services for teen parents.

The Department of Labor asked Redirection staff to identify the chief characteristics of their school that they felt contributed to its effectiveness with the students. School staff and the Department of Labor considered these characteristics to define a model that other school districts could adopt. Seven school districts were chosen through a competitive process to implement the model over a three-year period--Cincinnati, Denver,

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1 The STAR program was founded by Lynda Sarnoff in 1979 to address the literacy needs of students who appeared not to be progressing satisfactorily in their academic work.

Detroit, Los Angeles, Newark, Stockton, and Wichita. The Department of Labor partially funded the schools for two years; beginning in the third year, the seven districts assumed responsibility for funding the schools.

Elements Identified by the Department of Labor as Essential to the Replication of High School Redirection

- Implementation of open admissions policy resulting in recruitment of youth at high risk of dropping out of high school or of youth who already have.
- Enrollment by referral, not location.
- Recruitment of 150 students for the start-up year; 300 students by the second year; and plans for not more than 500 at time of full-scale operation.
- Location of school in a poor neighborhood.
- Facilities that are adequate for the implementation of the type of program proposed and that are separate from other high schools.
- Enrollment of at least one-third of students in the STAR reading and writing program, which includes a high teacher/student ratio and an immersion in an intensive reading and writing program for five periods a day.
- Operation of the school by the Board of Education and award of a regular high school diploma.
- Independence in operation, including autonomy in hiring suitable staff, setting disciplinary procedures and grading policies.
- On-site child care program for the children of students who are parents (by the second year).
- Limited extra-curricular activities (school should focus on providing academics).

AED's Documentation of the High School Redirection Replication

The Department of Labor also funded the Academy for Educational Development (AED) to document the implementation of the model at the seven sites and to provide technical assistance to the schools, school districts and regional Department of Labor administrative entities (Service Delivery Areas, SDA's).

The Department of Labor criteria for High School Redirection pertain to technical aspects of schools--size, components, location, etc. As a result, considerable latitude was left to the districts to adapt the model to local needs and conditions and to develop the academic program. The resulting local variations of the model could be seen in the choice of target populations; in the role of the school in the district, for example, as a dropout retrieval program or as an alternative school for potential dropouts from junior high schools; in the type of academic program that was developed; and in the level of financial and other forms of support provided to the schools by districts. In our documentation of each school, we tracked the replication of the Department of Labor criteria for the model, the implementation of strategies in the areas that were left to local interpretation and adaptation, and the quantitative school and student outcomes.

The result of the documentation project included not only an assessment of the extent to which the schools replicated components of the High School Redirection model, but also an assessment of the extent to which the schools addressed other criteria generally agreed to be important in meeting the educational needs of at-risk students in alternative settings. This included such factors as promoting school membership through creating a school community and providing an academic program that engages students with histories of academic failure and alienation from school. Specifically, developments in five critical areas associated with establishing effective alternative schools and achieving positive student and school outcomes were examined. These included:

- **City and District Context and Support**, the nature of the support provided by the school district in establishing the school, the evolution of that support, and how the local economic, social or political factors affected the implementation of the school and the nature of district support.

- **School Leadership**, the effectiveness of the school director in creating a vision for the school, in bringing about ownership of that vision, in creating collegial and supportive relations among staff, in securing district and community support, and in understanding the needs of the targeted student population.

- **Size, Vision and Community**, the ability of the school to create a community that promoted school membership and bonding to the school, and how that vision and sense of community evolved over the two years.

- **Academic Program**, the extent to which the school developed curriculum and instruction that effectively engaged young people in learning that is useful for their future work lives and post-secondary education.

- **Community/SDA/Business Linkages**, the extent to which the school created linkages that extended the school's capacity to provide needed social supports, employment, and preparation for employment and post-secondary education.

In addition a system for assessing initial outcomes was designed and school and student outcomes were tracked to determine persistence (overall and among subgroups of students), and changes in students' attendance, credit accumulation, and course passing rates from rates obtained in previous school settings. These inquiries guided the documentation project that AED undertook between July, 1988 and September, 1990. Documentation Activities included:

- Four two-day site visits to each of the schools during which the site visitors interviewed the directors, staff, administrative staff from the school district and SDA and also observed classes.

- Analyses of 2,314 data surveys (completed by school personnel for every student ever enrolled in 1988-89 and 1989-90) which provided information on student demographic characteristics, retention/persistence, and student outcomes in their previous schools and in the alternative schools in attendance, credit accumulation and course passing.

- Analyses of 1,029 student surveys which provided information on students' perceptions of school climate, instruction, school problems, assistance provided by school staff in addressing personal problems, academic difficulties, and other issues, (e.g., access to childcare, employment, and post-secondary education).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Alternative Schools as Dropout Prevention/Retrieval Strategies

Available research shows that alternative schools are among the most promising secondary level strategies to address dropout problems. Although their effectiveness is somewhat narrowly defined and systematic documentation is somewhat scarce, the value and appropriateness of alternative school programs for former and potential dropouts are frequently reported in the literature (Bryk and Thum 1989, Foley and Crull 1984, Hamilton 1986, Gregory and Smith 1983, Orr 1987). Research studies which have analyzed student responses and outcomes begin to illustrate the value of these programs. For example, Catterall and Stern (1986), in a secondary analysis of High School and Beyond data, found that potential dropouts who had participated in alternative school programs were less likely to drop out than potential dropouts who remained in regular school settings. Other researchers found that alternative schools were superior to conventional schools in meeting students' higher order needs (social interaction, self-esteem, self-actualization) (Gregory and Smith 1983). Foley and Crull (1984) found substantially increased attendance and credit performance among a group of 300 former and potential dropouts from eight alternative high schools in New York City. There is still a need, however, for more information about the interaction among school culture, program features, local context and student achievement.

A Theory of Dropout Prevention

Gary Wehlage and his colleagues Robert Rutter, Gregory Smith, Nancy Lesko, and Richard Fernandez (1989) developed a dropout prevention theory designed to provide a generalizable framework for understanding former and potential dropouts and their schools. Their theory, "intended to provide the conceptual language for program development, research and evaluation," emphasized school factors associated with dropping out (e.g., quality of relationships between adults and students, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards derived from school), and focused attention on those conditions (such as social interaction within the school

and curriculum design/use) over which practitioners have some control. School membership (the process by which institutional support promotes social bonding and therefore school involvement) and educational engagement (the psychological investment required to understand and acquire the knowledge and skills taught in school) comprise the central concepts of the theory. Their research demonstrates what common sense should suggest: that alternative schools can make a difference when their programs are geared to address the academic and social needs of students who have not succeeded in traditional learning environments.

Application of the Literature to the AED Documentation

In this documentation of the BOL schools the available research was applied in the following ways. Using a modification of the methodology developed for the study of the eight alternative schools in New York City (Foley and Crull 1984), we assessed school and student outcomes through a comparison of students' previous school outcomes in attendance, course passage and credit accumulation with their outcomes in the alternative schools. This allowed us to determine whether the schools made a difference in those areas and for which groups of students. Following the dropout prevention theory of Wehlage et al. (1989), we looked for the ways in which schools promoted school membership and educational engagement. This framework informed both our site observations and student surveys.

Beyond this framework, the documentation drew on specific aspects of the school change literature to understand the city and district context in which the schools were being implemented and the possibilities and constraints that this context provided in implementing the model and in creating alternative learning environments. We hypothesized that the model itself (since it was largely technical in nature) would not prove problematic in most districts that were committed to addressing the dropout problem through the creation of an alternative school; however, the educational content of the model -- namely conceptualizing and implementing a vision for the school, developing effective approaches to curriculum and instruction, and creating a school

organization that supported school membership and educational engagement would be far more complex. Of particular interest to our study were Louis and Miles' (1990) notions that small scale change requires at least two years for stabilization whereas complex comprehensive change requires five to ten years, and that school leadership and vision are central to the change process. Fullan's (1982) description of change as "the transformation of subjective realities" was also important. Practically, it suggests that administrators, teachers and other staff must buy into new ideas, try them out, refine them and adapt them to their own experiences and reality. This takes time, outside technical assistance and district support.

We viewed the Redirection model as a complex educational reform effort that required time, resources and district support to carry out. During the two years of the documentation, the schools were in the process of defining the nature and extent of the innovation. We used findings from the school change literature to guide our inquiry of the process of change in the schools including the study of: the district relationship to the school and its effect on school organization, curriculum and instruction; the leadership exerted by the directors in developing alternative learning environments; the technical assistance and staff development activities that were provided to stimulate effective organizational, curricular and instructional models; and the nature and extent of staff planning time for addressing school organizational issues, curriculum and instruction. This led to a framework for characterizing the implementation process at the alternative schools.

Five Areas Critical to Achieving Positive School and Student Outcomes

We have incorporated this framework into our documentation of the alternative schools and into our concept of lessons learned. As stated in the introduction, the following five areas were included: city and district context and support; school leadership; size, vision and community; academic program; and community/SDA/business linkages. Components of the areas and

factors specific to alternative settings are described in the following sections.

District Context and Support. School change literature acknowledges that elements within the district setting for a school can provide either a supportive or an unsupportive context for change and development. Those elements were expected to include funding and resource allocation, levels of commitment, and the role of the school in the district.

School Leadership. While school leadership is touted as one of the major forces behind creating effective schools, the components of good leadership are often debated. In their 1990 study of five reform efforts in urban schools, Louis and Miles identified the following characteristics of effective leaders:

- Ability to generate and communicate a vision of where the school is going and a process for getting there;
- Ability to promote staff ownership of the vision;
- Ability to plan in an evolutionary fashion, that is, by reflecting on everyday experience to assess what is and is not moving the school toward realizing the vision;
- Ability to obtain the maximum resources possible from the environment--from the district and the larger community--by actively taking advantage of opportunities;
- Ability to coordinate the evolution of the program and to cope effectively with minor and major problems and impediments.

Size, Vision and Community. The literature on alternative schools considers small size to be one of the key elements in their success with students. Creating a small school or small units within large schools where a limited number of adults and students interact both in and outside the classroom and where teachers act as mentors, advisers, and friends, relieves some of the problems found in large comprehensive schools. These problems, which include social isolation and insufficient attention to students' personal problems and learning needs, contribute to students' dropping out of school. While small school size does not guarantee that these problems will be addressed, it makes it easier to address them. It also makes it

possible for teachers to collaborate in planning and reviewing curriculum and instruction and therefore in meeting the learning needs of the students.

Although small size is critical to creating an effective learning environment for students who have been disaffected and disengaged from school in the past, it is not sufficient. Small size is critical because it is the condition that helps to create a sense of community, which in turn promotes student bonding to the school. By community, we mean:

- Shared goals and vision which are articulated by administration, staff and students;
- A school culture which exemplifies these goals and vision, including rituals, symbols, and the way in which students and adults in the school interact with one another;
- Opportunities to review and renew the goals and vision;
- Collegial, supportive relationships among adults in the school and an expanded role for the teachers as mentors and advisors to students.

Academic Program. For students who have dropped out of school or are at risk of doing so, it is critical to create an academic program that will (re)engage them in learning. For many, traditional approaches to curriculum and instruction have been alienating and unproductive; therefore, it is essential that alternative schools develop curricula and instructional strategies that engage students in learning, that meet their perceived needs, for example, for preparation for future employment or post-secondary education and that are culturally appropriate and sensitive. In particular, we examined how the schools approached working with students with very varied learning needs and styles, including in the Redirection STAR program, the intensive literacy program for students with reading far below grade level. We also investigated the relationship between the alternative school curriculum and the standard district curriculum, the cultural and career relevance of the curriculum, and methods of assessing students, including alternatives to traditional standardized testing and grades.

Community/SDA/Business Linkages. Because so many students in alternative schools face a wide range of barriers to school completion, it was essential for the schools to provide services for students or to develop linkages to services. These included vocational training and employment opportunities during the summer, after school and following graduation; linkages to post-secondary institutions; services for teen parents; medical care for students and their children, housing, etc. Among the community collaborations that we examined was that between the school and local Department of Labor Service Delivery Area since the development of this collaboration was an objective of the demonstration project.

The following two sections describe the documentation methodologies and summaries of documentation findings about replication, implementation, and school and student outcomes. They are followed by a discussion of lessons learned and recommendations for practitioners, researchers and project sponsors.

DOCUMENTATION METHODOLOGIES

Documenting Alternative Schools and Their Students

The replication demonstration took place in a total of seven school districts during the 1988-89 (Year 1) and 1989-90 (Year 2) school years. These included: Cincinnati, OH; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; Los Angeles, CA; Newark, NJ; Stockton, CA; and Wichita, KS. Only six sites, however, were fully participating in both the replication and the documentation project each year. Detroit did not open its alternative school until Year 2, while Denver ceased participating in the documentation/technical assistance project in Year 2. Background characteristics of the student populations at each site for each year are described in Appendix A. The combined qualitative and quantitative methods used to study and document the alternative schools are described in the following sections.

Site Visits. Two-day site visits to each of the schools were conducted in the fall and spring of the 1988-89 and 1989-90 school years. During these visits, directors, school staff, administrative staff from the school district, and SDA representatives were interviewed, and schools and classrooms were observed, to determine the extent to which:

- the DOL model features had been replicated;
- the five critical areas had developed.

Site visitors used protocols developed by the AED project management team in conjunction with DOL representatives, and created site-specific reports at the conclusion of each visit.

Student Opinion Surveys. Anonymous surveys were administered to alternative school students in the late spring of 1989 and 1990 (and to some students in the fall of 1991). The number of surveys per site is reported in the following table.

SITE	Number Surveyed Year 1	Number Surveyed Year 2
Cincinnati	49	149
Denver	63	NA
Detroit	NA	91
Los Angeles	34	88
Newark	48	105
Stockton	71	154
Wichita	53	124
TOTAL	318	711

Student opinions about school climate and academics as well as assessments of experiences in their current and previous schools were examined.

These respondents represent selective, non-random samples of persisting students from the schools. In year one all students still enrolled at the end of the year who were in attendance on the day of the administration were surveyed. In year two that process was also utilized for Detroit, Los Angeles, Newark, and

Stockton. Cincinnati and Wichita were unable to administer the survey in the spring of 1990 but agreed to do so in the fall of 1991. This design, and the resultant sample, though admittedly biased[2], combined administrative feasibility with a purposive strategy to gather information from respondents who had adequate experience/tenure with the school and were students for whom the schools were "working." Background characteristics of the surveyed students at each site for each year are described in Appendix B.

Student Data Surveys. The data surveys gathered demographic background data and information about students' attendance and achievement in their prior schools and at the alternative school. The surveys were completed by school officials for all students ever enrolled in each school. Results from those surveys for both years were entered into a statistical data base and analyzed longitudinally. The number of surveys analyzed from each site is reported in the following table.

SITE	Number Surveyed Year 1	Number Surveyed Year 2
Cincinnati	152	151
Denver	164	NA
Detroit	NA	132
Los Angeles	122	153
Newark	176	206
Stockton	263	468
Wichita	198	128
TOTAL	1075	1238

Assessment of Initial School and Student Outcomes

School Outcomes. The schools were assessed, as described above, in terms of their effectiveness and progress in replicating the DOL model and in implementing alternative

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2 Absentees, long-term truants and students who had left the program were not surveyed.

educational programs through development of the five critical areas. Data from site visit reports and student surveys were combined to assess outcomes for each school and for the project overall.

Student Outcomes. The studies of initial student outcomes were focused on attendance, course passing, credit accumulation, and retention/persistence/holding power. Analyses were conducted as follows.

1. Mean **attendance, course passing rates, and credit accumulation rates** were determined for each site and compared to prior school performance. Distribution of the data were examined to determine how many of the students were attending more than 50 percent of the possible days, passing more than 50 percent of the possible classes, and accumulating more than 50 percent of the possible credits.

2. Retention is used here to describe the ability of the schools to maintain student enrollment. It was measured by examining the year-end status of all students enrolled each year. Retained students are those who are still attending or who have graduated from the alternative school by the end of the year. Persistence is a measure of students' continued pursuit of education. Persisting students are those who are still attending the alternative school, who have graduated from the alternative school, or who have transferred to another school. Mean **retention** rates and overall **persistence** were determined for each site.

3. **Holding power**, defined as the percentage of students who return to school after the summer, was determined for each site and retention rates for returning students were calculated.

The results of these analyses were used to assess initial student outcomes at each site and across all project sites.

FINDINGS

In this section, we present the findings derived from our two-year documentation experience with the alternative schools.

Findings on Replication

Replication of the model involved complying with the model elements identified by the Department of Labor as essential to the creation of Redirection High Schools. This included an open

admission policy; enrollment by referral not location; recruitment of 150 students for the first year, 300 by the second, and no more than 500 at full-scale operation; location of the school in a poor neighborhood; facilities separate from other high schools; enrollment of at least one-third of the students in the STAR reading and writing program; operation of the school by the Board of Education and award of a regular high school diploma; independence in operation including hiring and policy setting; on-site child care; and limited extra-curricular activities.

For the most part, the sites were able to replicate most of the model criteria. Size, and the establishment of childcare centers proved the most difficult to comply with. The following specific outcomes resulted from the demonstration.

- All seven districts established schools by the second year; most were in or near poor neighborhoods.
- Five of the schools had separate facilities by the second year.
- Six of the schools enrolled less than the 300 students by the end of 1989-90 (median size was 170 students in Year 1 and 152 in Year 2); only one school enrolled more than 300 students, the number projected in the model. One of the schools planned to enroll 500 students in Year 3. Size was the most difficult aspect of the model to replicate. All of the schools linked small size to the creation of a school community and decided that too rapid an increase in size in the second year and too large a number of students would undermine the school community and whatever gains they made in the first year.
- All of the schools targeted at-risk students, including former dropouts and potential dropouts, over age students, teen parents, students with low reading scores, credit deficient students, and students from poor families as evidenced by free lunch and JTPA eligibility. Student populations varied at each site, depending on the population targeted by the school (primarily former dropouts or potential dropouts, junior or high school students) and on the local context (e.g., the presence of gangs led to high female enrollment and the existence of on-site childcare facilitated enrollment of teen mothers).
- All of the schools maintained an open admissions policy and drew students from many areas of the city; one school recruited students only from the immediate neighborhood.

- All of the schools focused primarily on the development of the academic program not on extracurricular activities.

- Six of the schools offered the STAR program, an intensive reading and writing program to students with reading levels below sixth grade; from 15 to 33 percent of the students were enrolled in this program across sites.

- All of the schools had considerable autonomy in hiring staff and in establishing rules of conduct; they had less autonomy in determining curriculum and methods of student assessment.

- Four of the schools had childcare centers that accommodated from 12 to 40 children by the end of the second year.

- All of the schools formed linkages with community-based organizations to provide needed support services to students, including counseling, pre-employment classes, Montessori training for childcare centers' staff, adolescent health services, family planning, and conflict resolution for gangs.

- All of the schools provided one or more of the following employment and vocational programs: summer school and employment; paid work experience; pre-employment skills; a linkage with a vocational school or center, post-graduation employment or post-secondary education.

- Six of the schools developed some relationship with the local SDA and had JTPA funded programs in their schools.

Findings on Implementation and the Development of the Critical Areas

Although replication of the model elements was generally achieved at each of the sites, the educational content of the model -- namely conceptualizing and implementing a vision for the school, developing effective approaches to curriculum and instruction, and creating a school organization that supported school membership and educational engagement was, as expected, far more complex. The extent to which the schools addressed other criteria generally agreed to be important in meeting the educational needs of at-risk students in alternative settings, and developed the five critical areas is reported below.

- The model itself was implemented in different ways in each of the sites depending on the students who were targeted, the level of resources supplied by the district, the leadership and vision provided by the director, the role of the school in districtwide reform and dropout prevention.

District Support

- Districts varied greatly in their financial and administrative support of the school; supportive districts saw the school as filling a need in their dropout prevention strategies; districts without clear leadership in this area or with ambivalence about the role of the school in their overall strategy, were not consistently supportive of the school.

- Unsupportive district contexts had the following characteristics: budget problems which prevented the district from allocating sufficient funds or resources to operate the school with appropriate staff levels, space or materials; insufficient commitment to implementation (especially as a result of changes in leadership in the district after the grant award); several jurisdictions for alternative programs, with conflicting agendas.

- Supportive districts, although certainly not free of problems, did the following: viewed the schools as filling a need in dropout prevention or retrieval; committed sufficient resources to support implementation of the school. In every case, they were districts that already had a commitment to alternative education programs and therefore viewed the school as expanding the number and type of students it could serve.

- Only three of the seven cities provided supportive contexts for the schools in Year 1. During Year 2, one of the unsupportive districts (which had contended with a change in superintendents and rejection of a bond issue) was able to see the program as fitting with the direction of district restructuring and was therefore able to provide the necessary support to facilitate implementation.

- All of the districts had goals for the schools that were different from those set by the schools, particularly in regard to recruitment policies and outcome measures.

- All of the district offices held the schools to outcome measures that the schools perceived unrealistic (e.g., lower dropout rates than other high schools) and all of the schools experienced district pressure to accept all students who were referred, regardless of their suitability for the program.

- Schools varied in the extent to which they were able to achieve a sense of community in the school.

- All of the schools targeted at-risk students; however, schools differed in the students whom they targeted especially in regard to age, dropout status, gender, race, ethnicity, and level of academic achievement as measured by standardized tests and credit accumulation.

- School directors developed leadership qualities as the schools evolved; by the end of Year 2, they all began to articulate a school vision and to communicate this vision and a process for attaining it to the staff.

Academic Program

- Only three of the schools had an academic vision for the school that departed from the traditional high school curriculum.

- Most of the schools initially conceived of their task as providing students with a route to a high school diploma through cover age of the traditional curriculum.

- Over time, all of the schools began to see that successful implementation of the model required that they review the school's academic program and instructional approaches to see if they were engaging students, if they promoted students' interest in learning, and if they produced positive outcomes.

- The STAR program was difficult to implement because the schools lacked curriculum materials from High School Redirection in Brooklyn and from their districts, and their teachers were not experienced in developing a program that would address the needs of low level readers and still provide some of the content of a regular high school curriculum.

- Schools received little assistance from the districts in developing alternative approaches to curriculum and instruction; they did use their DOL grants, however, to do staff development in a number of areas relating to the academic program.

- Schools did not make a connection between poor attendance and the lack of student engagement in the curriculum; poor attendance was addressed primarily as a student problem (resulting from social or economic circumstances or from poor habits which students had acquired in other academic settings).

- None of the schools developed a coherent approach to developing the analytic, problem-solving and social skills increasingly needed in the workplace.

Community, SDA, Business and Post-Secondary Linkages

- The schools were successful in establishing effective linkages with community-based organizations which supplemented their support services for students in a number of areas.

- The schools were only moderately successful in establishing a linkage with the SDA; this linkage was stronger in some cities than in others, depending on the SDA's prior experiences with the school district and on already existing budget and programmatic priorities.

- The employment-related components in the schools differed by site and in no case were a major focus of the curriculum.

- Employment was a current and future priority for the students (approximately one half of the employed students who responded to the student survey held jobs for 20 or more hours per week; and most of the surveyed students expected to work after graduation or to combine school and work), yet the schools did not develop a coherent approach to addressing their current and future employment needs, or to linking work experience to the academic curriculum.

Findings on School and Student outcomes

As part of the documentation of the schools' implementation of the model during the first two years, AED collected data through a survey (completed by school officials) of all students ever enrolled at each of the schools (for both years). Our goal was to assess the schools' effectiveness in retaining and promoting student achievement through regular attendance and through meeting course requirements. The survey requested demographic information on every student ever enrolled as well as comparative data from the alternative school and the prior school on attendance, courses passed, credit accumulation and standardized achievement tests.[3] Additionally, AED was able to develop a fairly accurate, longitudinal picture of which students were retained at the alternative schools (including graduates), which students left the alternative schools to pursue other educational options (transfers), and which students left the alternative programs without completing high school or entering other programs. We were also able to compare the schools' effectiveness in retaining certain subgroups (e.g., teen parents, students with low reading scores).

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[3] Test scores were assessed for STAR students only.

Retention, Persistence and Holding Power

- The schools enrolled and retained a substantial number of at-risk students. Retention (staying in school or graduating) and persistence (staying in school, transferring to another school, or graduating) of students ranged from about 50 to 90 percent with considerable fluctuation among sites. Though some rates may seem low in comparison to district or national trends, the concentrated nature of the populations must be considered (i.e., these schools, unlike most other district schools, are composed of entire populations of dropout-prone students who have already voiced their intentions to leave public school at least once).

- More than fifty percent of the students persisted in all of the schools in both years (from 50 to 99 percent), and particular subgroups of traditionally difficult-to-retain students, including students with low reading scores, students who were credit deficient on entering the school and over age students, were retained at the same or higher rates than the overall population of students in several of the schools. In three of the schools, year-two persistence rates were greater than 90 percent.

- Improvement (from Year 1 to Year 2) in retention and persistence rates occurred at every site, and improvement in holding power at some sites was evidenced. In addition many former or potential dropouts graduated from these alternative schools.

- The schools were able to serve some but not all sub-populations who are traditionally dropout prone. Overage students and those who had been credit deficient or low reading level students persisted in substantial numbers at several of the sites. Teen mothers and former dropouts were not as well served. Significant numbers of students who continued to fail courses left the alternative schools. Overall it was clear that some sites did better with some sub-populations than others. This seems perfectly reasonable considering the diversity within the dropout population.

- The three schools which enrolled both former dropouts and transfers were more effective at retaining students who were transfers than students who had already dropped out. This suggests that former dropouts are more tenuously connected to school because of outside commitments (family, employment) and the effect of previous school disillusionment.

- Teen mothers were retained at lower rates in all of the schools than the general population of female students in the first year; in schools with childcare centers they were retained at the same rate in the second year, suggesting the importance of childcare to the retention of teen parents.

- All of the schools had a substantial core of students who persisted, including some who persisted for two and three years, and who graduated or transferred to other educational settings. These students tended to be "school oriented," that is, they passed most of their courses, attended more than fifty percent of the time, and accumulated more credits toward graduation than the overall student population at each site.

Attendance

- Overall, attendance at the alternative schools was low, especially in Year 1. Many students attended fewer than half of the possible days. At each site, however, there were a number of students who attended regularly (75 percent or more of the possible days). In addition, in two sites, average attendance in Year 2 approached or exceeded 75 percent. And at two of the five sites for which there was comparative data, improvements over prior attendance means were evident.

Course Passing

- Overall, course passing at most of the alternative schools was fairly low, especially in Year 1. Many students passed fewer than half of the possible courses. In addition, in three sites, average course passing rates in Year 2 approached or exceeded 75 percent. Four of the five sites for which there was comparative data, demonstrated improvements over prior course passing rates. The extent of course failure is of concern, however, given the close association between failure and school leaving.

Credit Accumulation

- Overall, credit accumulation, was also low at most of the alternative schools, especially in Year 1. Many students earned fewer than half of the available credits. However, as for attendance and course passing, at each site there were a number of students who earned most of the available credits (75 percent or more). In addition, in two sites, average credit accumulation rates in Year 2 approached or exceeded 75 percent.

Student Perception and Experiences

- **Climate:** Surveyed students in all of the schools felt that the climate in the schools was positive, as determined by relationships with teachers and peers. The greatest amount of agreement was that teachers and counselors were available to talk about school and personal problems.

- **Instruction:** Instruction and academics were rated good or very good at each of the schools although there was greater disagreement among respondents over the character of instruction and its benefit to them than about climate at the schools.

- **Comparative Experiences:** The overwhelming majority of surveyed students in both years reported that they had worked harder, had better grades, felt more satisfied with their academic performance, and had better attendance in the alternative schools than in their prior schools.

LESSONS LEARNED

Creating an alternative school that is effective with students with histories of prior failure and disaffection from school is a daunting task. It cannot be accomplished easily or quickly as the High School Redirection Replication Project showed and as the literature on school reform and on implementation of school innovations conclusively demonstrates.

The five conditions critical to implementation were in flux throughout the life of the project; for example, one site's district was not supportive of the project until the middle of the second year of the project; two sites' directors only began to articulate a clear vision for the school in the second year; the academic program remained either very traditional or in considerable flux during most of the two years at all of the schools; and the employment linkages were not strong in any of the schools except one. All of these areas were in the process of development over the two years and therefore affected school and student outcomes in different ways at different times. In addition, in several of the sites, outside factors had a strong impact on the schools: for example, in one school, a teacher's strike in the second year, occurring after the school had just

relocated, created a negative and lasting impact on school and student outcomes in that year.

The five critical conditions were related in a complex fashion to positive school and student outcomes; however, other factors also contributed, especially the students who were targeted, the amount of selectivity schools were able to exercise in accepting students, and the fit between the academic program and the needs of the targeted students. What AED was able to document in this project were concurrently occurring positive changes in the development of these critical conditions and increasingly positive school and student outcomes in such areas as retention and attendance.

The schools in the demonstration began to establish some of the conditions that the school change literature suggests are necessary for the implementation of a complex school innovation--a school vision, leader ownership of it, on-going reflection on everyday experience, and new roles for teachers. As the school change literature indicates, more time than two years is needed for a complex innovation to become successfully institutionalized. AED found that several of the schools were hindered from the beginning because they did not recognize that the creation of an alternative school involves a rethinking of virtually every aspect of school programming and culture. For example, at first, most of the schools did not place a major emphasis on understanding the diverse learning needs of students and on creating curriculum and instruction to address these needs; they also did not provide sufficient time for staff to plan and review curriculum and instruction. By the end of the second year all of the schools were beginning to pay greater attention to planning and reviewing the academic program and to the importance of engaging students in learning.

Districts often did not regard the schools as educational innovations and expected them to implement the traditional high school curriculum and have student outcomes comparable to other schools by the end of two years. Both were unreasonable expectations that ironically helped the schools to understand the complexity of their task and to advocate more strongly for

alternative approaches to school organization, curriculum and instruction. If districts had understood the importance of creating innovative programs to engage students in learning who were previously disaffected from school and if they had had greater appreciation of the schools' efforts to create a positive school climate, they would have paid more attention to nurturing the implementation efforts, rather than to measuring the outcomes in traditional ways. They might also have established some intermediate outcome measures such as staff involvement in development of curriculum; measures of student engagement in learning such as improved attendance; the creation of family groups and their impact on attendance and retention.

It was apparent to AED that many of the conditions for creating effective alternative schools were present at some of the sites by the end of the second year, and that if districts could nurture the development of these conditions and if schools refined their vision and spent more time planning and evaluating the successes and failures in their programs, they were likely to evolve into effective models of alternative education for students who had dropped out or were drop-out prone. AED believes that a further investigation of the relationship of the five conditions outlined in Part I to positive school and student outcomes is essential to assisting alternative schools to develop effective programs for at-risk students and for future replications of the High School Redirection model.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY MAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Recommendations Regarding Implementation

- Schools are most likely to receive district support if they meet local needs by targeting a student population that other alternative schools are not targeting or if they bolster the district's restructuring and reform agenda.

- The district must be willing to put adequate resources into the school to make it workable. This includes minimally an adequate physical plant and materials to carry out the academic program and a low student to staff ratio, including support staff. All of the schools have staff-student ratios of 1:25 or less in regular classes and of 1:15 or less in the STAR program.

- The rate of growth in school size should be determined by available resources, especially staff-student ratio, and the school's effectiveness in developing a school community that promotes student bonding and school membership.

- Districts must allow new schools time to stabilize their programs before they evaluate them. Most of the school change literature suggests that the implementation of a reform requires from three to five years. Districts could establish intermediate outcomes which could be assessed, for example, development of curriculum and instruction that address the learning needs of the targeted students and development of a school community that promotes school membership as indicated by improvements in retention.

- Districts should develop ways to assess the performance of alternative schools that reflect the schools' own goals and desired outcomes. These forms of evaluation, such as a random sampling of portfolios of students' work, could be used in addition to more standard measures such as test scores and attendance rates. In addition, they could compare the performance of students in the schools to their previous performance in traditional schools to see whether it improved in the alternative school.

- Districts should provide technical assistance to directors and school staff to assist them in developing a vision for the school and a sense of community in the school.

Recommendations Regarding the Academic Program

- Districts must offer alternative schools support and technical assistance in developing curricula and instructional approaches that are likely to engage students with histories of failure in learning. Such support can take the form of encouragement to develop new approaches to curriculum and instruction and technical assistance in developing them.

- In order to implement proven instructional strategies, such as cooperative learning, writing process, whole language approaches to teaching low-level readers, teachers must be provided with training and intensive follow-up support.

- Districts should encourage schools to create schedules that provide time for teachers to plan curriculum and to assess their instructional approaches, and the overall effectiveness of the curriculum and instruction.

- Districts should assist schools in developing alternative ways of assessing student performance that are aligned with the curricula and instruction in alternative schools. These assessments could include portfolios of students' work and other performance measures that demonstrate the development of student competencies.

- Districts should support schools in developing a coherent approach in their curricula and instructional approaches to preparing students for the cognitive, academic and social demands of the workplace, for example by emphasizing the development of problem-solving, analytic and cooperative skills.

Recommendations on Community, JTPA, Business and Other Linkages

- The schools should provide opportunities for every student to be employed and to investigate careers of interest to them. Investigation of workplaces (including those where students are employed) and development of employment-related skills should be part of the curriculum.

- Vocational linkages should be further explored but should be integrated with academic work, as one of the schools was beginning to do.

- Every graduating student should be assured of a job or of post-secondary education. Students should be followed up after graduation to document employment and post-secondary outcomes. These outcomes should be evaluated to assess the school's effectiveness in developing students' capacity for future employment and economic self-sufficiency.

Recommendations Regarding School and Student Outcomes

- In an effort to improve school outcomes, such as retention, attendance, course passing and credit accumulation, schools should attend to the five critical areas mentioned above, including district support, leadership and vision, developing a sense of community, the content of the academic program, and the nature and extent of community, SDA and other employment-related linkages.

- Schools must tailor their program to the students they target--younger dropout prone youth require a different program than older, former dropouts. For example, older youth may have extensive out-of-school obligations that require scheduling flexibility and may be particularly interested in programs that support their current or future employment.

- Schools should collect data on retention and persistence of various subgroups of students to better understand which students they are succeeding with and which ones require additional or different services or programs, for example teen parents, over age students, etc.

- Schools should constantly evaluate the meaning of their successes and failures with students and link this discussion to school improvements. For example, if student attendance is a problem, the schools must identify aspects of the school program that might promote better attendance as well as identifying ways to change student behavior. Similarly, schools should evaluate the reasons for course failure and how the school program can help to promote academic success. In most of the schools, interventions regarding attendance or course passing tended to focus only on improving student behavior, rather than on improving the school program.

- Schools should learn from their own program successes. For example, the STAR programs in some of the schools had better attendance and retention than the rest of the school. Schools should assess what aspects of the structure and content of STAR could be applied to the whole school.

- Schools should collect data on student outcomes in school and after graduation and publicize this data to educate the district and larger community about the school, its approaches, and their relationship to student success in employment and post-secondary education.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE 1.1 AGE AND GRADE STATUS OF STUDENTS ATTENDING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS 1988-89: BY CITY

	Cincinnati		Denver		Los Angeles		Newark		Stockton		Wichita	
	Ever*	Still*	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still
N=	152	87	164	161	122	93	176	91	263	123	198	121
Percentage of students by age:												
Less than sixteen	**	0%	23%	22%	9%	8%	0%	0%	3%	5%	4%	4%
Sixteen	5	7	45	45	18	16	0	0	12	13	24	29
Seventeen	38	43	22	21	21	22	3	2	29	34	23	28
Eighteen	37	30	5	5	29	28	35	31	29	25	29	25
Nineteen or older	20	18	2	2	22	27	60	66	22	15	17	11
Unknown	1	2	3	5	1	1	2	1	6	8	3	3
Percentage of students by grade:												
Ninth	74%	73%	99%	99%	25%	17%	20%	15%	49%	48%	30%	31%
Tenth	22	22	0	0	40	43	19	22	26	28	39	44
Eleventh	3	5	0	0	22	26	22	21	13	14	20	17
Twelfth	0	0	0	0	12	13	24	30	5	6	9	7
Unknown	1	1	1	1	1	1	14	12	7	5	2	2
Percentage of students overage for grade: +	88%	83%	29%	28%	37%	38%	63%	66%	56%	46%	31%	23%
Percentage of students overage for the cohort	5%	3%			14%	17%	9%	7%	7%	6%	4%	2%

* "Ever" refers to having ever been enrolled and "still" refers to students still enrolled at the close of the 1988-89 school year.

+ Distributions of grades and overage students are significantly different across cities.

** Less than 1%

Overage for grade = >16 in 9th grade >=17
>17 in 10th grade >=18
>18 in 11th grade >=19
>19 in 12th grade >=20

Overage for cohort = 2+years older than the mean age

TABLE 1.2 AGE AND GRADE STATUS OF STUDENTS ATTENDING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS 1989-90: BY CITY

	Cincinnati		Detroit		Los Angeles		Newark		Stockton		Wichita	
	Ever*	Still*	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still
N=	151	147	132	121	153	138	206	119	468	264	128	93
Percentage of students by age:												
Less than sixteen	0%	0%	48%	50%	3%	3%	0%	0%	6%	8%	3%	4%
Sixteen	8	8	45	45	16	17	0	0	18	21	21	18
Seventeen	36	36	.7	5	24	23	8	8	30	33	31	28
Eighteen	36	37	0	0	23	22	37	39	22	22	16	20
Nineteen or older	19	18	0	0	27	28	52	50	21	14	27	28
Unknown	1	1	0	0	7	7	2	3	3	2	1	1
Percentage of students by grade:+												
Ninth	62%	63%	100%	100%	23%	23%	29%	26%	51%	47%	23%	23%
Tenth	23	23	0	0	32	33	23	22	23	22	41	36
Eleventh	10	9	0	0	29	28	22	24	12	14	9	8
Twelfth	4	4	0	0	13	15	17	19	6	7	27	34
Unknown	1	1	0	0	3	3	9	9	9	10	1	0
Percentage of students overage for grade: +	77%	77%	7%	5%	40%	39%	74%	70%	51%	42%	30%	28%
Percentage of students overage for the cohort	6%	6%	0%	0%	16%	16%	6%	7%	10%	6%	10%	10%

* "Ever" refers to having ever been enrolled and "still" refers to students still enrolled at the close of the 1988-89 school year including graduates.

+ Distributions of grades and overage students are significantly different across cities.

** Less than 1%

Overage for grade = >16 in 9th grade >=17
>17 in 10th grade >=18
>18 in 11th grade >=19
>19 in 12th grade >=20

Overage for cohort = 2+years older than the mean age

TABLE 2.1 RACE/ETHNICITY, GENDER AND FREE LUNCH ELIGIBILITY STATUS OF STUDENTS ATTENDING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS 1988-89: BY CITY

	Cincinnati		Denver		Los Angeles		Newark		Stockton		Wichita	
	Ever*	Still*	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still
N=	152	87	164	161	122	93	176	91	263	123	198	121
Percentage of students by race/ethnicity:												
Black	73%	75%	17%	17%	95%	93%	93%	96%	23%	17%	32%	33%
White	27	25	27	27	0	0	0	0	28	26	56	54
Hispanic	0	0	51	52	4	5	3	3	39	47	7	8
Other	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	9	9	5	5
Unknown	0	0	4	3	1	1	3	1	1	2	0	0
Percentage of students by gender:												
Male	53%	56%	51%	50%	43%	31%	49%	51%	45%	46%	51%	46%
Female	47	44	42	43	56	68	48	48	51	50	49	54
Unknown	0	0			1	1	3	1	5	3	0	0
Percentage of students eligible for free lunch:												
Yes	41%	46%	27%	27%	75%	72%	43%	41%	39%	30%	26%	22%
No	52	47	4	4	0	0	45	47	47	59	71	75
Unknown	7	7	69	69	25	28	13	12	15	11	3	3

* "Ever" refers to having ever been enrolled and "still" refers to students still enrolled at the close of the 1988-89 school year.

TABLE 2.2 RACE/ETHNICITY, GENDER AND FREE LUNCH ELIGIBILITY STATUS OF STUDENTS ATTENDING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS 1989-90: BY CITY

	Cincinnati		Detroit		Los Angeles		Newark		Stockton		Wichita	
	Ever*	Still*	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still	Ever	Still
N=	151	147	132	121	153	138	206	119	468	263	128	93
Percentage of students by race/ethnicity:												
Black	72%	71%	100%	92%	92%	92%	97%	98%	25%	22%	42%	43%
White	27	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	21	48	45
Hispanic	1	1	0	0	8	7	2	2	44	46	6	8
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	10	10	3	3
Unknown	1	1	0	8	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	1
Percentage of students by gender:												
Male	55%	55%	71%	74%	36%	32%	45%	46%	43%	44%	38%	41%
Female	44	44	29	26	61	65	55	54	57	55	62	59
Unknown	1	1	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	1	0	0
Percentage of students eligible for free lunch:												
Yes	52%	51%	NA	NA	92%	93%	42%	42%	2%	1%	10%	11%
No	13	13			0	0	45	47	94	95	20	24
Unknown	35	36			8	7	14	11	4	4	70	66

* "Ever" refers to having ever been enrolled and "still" refers to students still enrolled at the close of the 1988-89 school year.

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS: 1988-89

	Cincinnati N=49	Denver N=63	Los Angeles N=34	Newark N=48	Stockton N=71	Wichita N=53
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	63%	14%	97%	88%	16%	21%
Hispanic	0	51	0	8	41	13
White	31	30	0	0	35	53
Other	6	3	0	4	7	11
Gender						
Male	55%	51%	29%	61%	48%	49%
Female	45	48	71	40	52	45
Primary language non-English	2%	3%	0%	6%	11%	10%
Age as of 5/1/89						
Fifteen or less	2%	24%	12%	0%	3%	4%
Sixteen	12	49	27	0	17	36
Seventeen	45	16	24	10	38	26
Eighteen	22	3	12	44	27	15
Nineteen and older	10	3	21	44	13	8
Grade Level						
9th grade	51%	24%	24%	13%	13%	26%
10th grade	33	56	29	8	24	42
11th grade	12	10	27	44	42	13
12th grade	0	8	6	35	20	15
Percent overage for grade*	51%	11%	24%	52%	17%	6%
Percent overage for population**	11%	7%	21%	5%	6%	8%
Entry Status						
Dropout	12%	24%	82%	56%	28%	11%
Transfer	76	59	15	33	62	83
Percentage if all students who are parents	22%	13%	27%	19%	21%	13%
Percentage of all students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch	43%	51%	77%	48%	16%	15%

* Overage for grade is defined as follows: >16 in 9th grade
>17 in 10th grade
>18 in 11th grade
>19 in 12th grade

** Overage for population is defined as:
>18 in Cincinnati (mean=17.3, SD=1.0)
>17 in Denver (mean=16.1, SD=1.0)
>19 in Los Angeles (mean=17.3, SD=1.9)
>20 in Newark (mean=18.6, SD=1.0)
>19 in Stockton (mean=17.3, SD=1.2)
>18 in Wichita (mean=16.9, SD=1.0)

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DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS: 1989-90

	Cincinnati N=149	Detroit N=91	Los Angeles N=88	Newark N=105	Stockton N=154	Wichita N=124
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	70%	86%	80%	95%	18%	26%
Hispanic	3	3	14	4	47	9
White	22	1	0	0	24	49
Other	4	4	3	1	8	11
Gender						
Male	46%	59%	43%	50%	51%	45%
Female	52	37	55	50	47	52
Primary language non-English	3%	2%	13%	3%	13%	6%
Age as of 5/1/89						
Fifteen or less	2%	40%	7%	0%	9%	8%
Sixteen	13	45	18	0	18	21
Seventeen	36	5	22	7	30	28
Eighteen	23	0	26	27	25	24
Nineteen and older	19	1	23	66	13	12
Grade Level						
9th grade	21%	95%	21%	10%	20%	11%
10th grade	28	3	33	16	27	21
11th grade	28	0	21	27	32	23
12th grade	22	1	21	46	18	42
Entry Status						
Dropout	28%	24%	55%	56%	28%	33%
Transfer	66	59	40	33	62	65
Percentage of all students who are parents	30%	4%	28%	18%	19%	19%
Percentage of all students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch	37%	26%	77%	60%	12%	31%

NOTE: Surveys fielded in Fall.

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